

- Report No. 82
- January-February 1989

Women's Concerns Report



Mennonite Women Leaders 'Round the World Part II



Basing her sermons and keynote addresses upon biblical passages well known to Christian women—the story of Martha and Mary, Galatians 3:28—and some verses that are less well known—II Samuel 6:16-23, for example,—Leonor de Mendez held the 1988 Convention of Hispanic Mennonite women spellbound.

“Jesus was considered a rabbi and was thus prohibited from giving the Word to women. That Mary sat at his feet was very significant. Jesus was saying to Mary, ‘You are worth being taught. You are a daughter of God,’” Leonor told the group assembled in San Antonio, Texas last April.

“In Jesus’ new reign, we women have a new place,” Leonor exclaimed. “We are not to be marginalized or oppressed; we are not to be shut up in the house.”

“Mary was undoubtedly criticized for sitting there. But she dared to risk it—and she received the Lord.”

Leonor de Mendez has risked much, too. She dares to speak of a new reign of God in which “He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty” in a land wracked by political repression against the poor and powerless and those who stand with the poor. And this

Guatemalan pastor further risks criticism in a macho culture for daring to leave the confines of family and home, for daring to balance her personal and professional needs and aspirations with those of her children and husband.

Leonor is among a growing group of Mennonite women leaders the world over who are seeking God’s word for today’s women and who are reclaiming and proclaiming the liberty Jesus gave us to be fully part of the church.

In this issue of *Report* we continue to share the stories and struggles of pioneer church leaders like Leonor:

—Esther Harso of Indonesia who, despite her passion for medicine, promised her father on his deathbed that she would dedicate her life to church service.

—Suse Janzen de Penner, whose life work is described by Mennonite Board of Missions staffperson Gerald Mumaw as “deaconing at its best,” overcame the narrow confines of her colony upbringing to attend seminary, learn Portuguese and serve her Brazilian neighbors with a “flair for work and service.”

—Alba de Escobar is the first ordained Mennonite woman pastor in Guatemala. She and her husband Rafael model mutuality and shared leadership to the congregation they serve as pastoral couple.

—Mayumi Miki, a chemist by training, suffered alienation from her family when she decided to devote her talents to full-time church service. Without her family’s support, she especially feels the inadequacy of support systems for women leaders in the Japanese church.

—Milka Rindzinski, the first Uruguayan to be baptized in the Mennonite church some 30 years ago, now serves in a position where she can influence the curriculum, and thus the theological base, of tomorrow’s church leaders in that country.

May the stories of these faithful servants of God enrich and encourage us all.

Emily Will began to compile this issue while serving as women’s concerns coordinator in MCC’s Akron offices. She and her husband Mark and their two sons, Peter, 8, and Jason, 4, are now working in community development with the MCC Mexico program. They are members of Pilgrims Mennonite Church in Lancaster County, Pa.

by Mildred L. Yoder

Leonor de Mendez

Many people consider Leonor de Mendez to be the most gifted preacher in the Guatemalan Mennonite Church—and perhaps in all of Guatemala. When she is scheduled to speak, people know they can expect a well organized message with an appropriate theme and sound application, delivered in an enthusiastic yet low-key manner.

As Leonor grew up in a Christian home, God was presented to her as a friend and helper. At age 12 Leonor began to teach area children. Later, she was given a scholarship to study at a Baptist Bible Institute, El Calvario. She graduated with a degree in Christian Education. Here she met her husband, Mario, who was also a student.

From the beginning of their marriage, Leonor and Mario have cooperated with home and family duties so that they have been able to continue their involvement in the Lord's work. Leonor's life is a full one. Her family with four children, now between the ages of 10 and 19, is important to her. In addition to church work, Bible study and family responsibilities, Leonor is also involved in a small business which she and Mario own.

Leonor loves to study. It is painful to her when she occasionally needs to miss a course offered by SEMILLA, a seminary curriculum offered in Central America by Eastern Board. She tries to take as many of the six SEMILLA courses offered each year as her schedule will allow, hoping to eventually complete a theology degree.

Leonor regrets that in the years between Bible institute and SEMILLA she was not able to do as much formal study as she is now aware is necessary. She was so concerned with giving that she missed meeting her own needs. She feels at peace now with a balance that includes formal study.

Leonor feels that her congregation, Casa Horeb, has come to accept her and has allowed her to develop in her ministry. Many times it is the women who don't see equality of men and women as an option. She has been working to encourage other women's development by leading, for example, a women's group of about fifteen. In addition to occasional preaching, Leonor is in charge of children's Christian education at Casa Horeb, involving about 80 youth. She holds weekly planning sessions for the teachers. She and Mario also meet with a cluster group of adults each Tuesday evening.

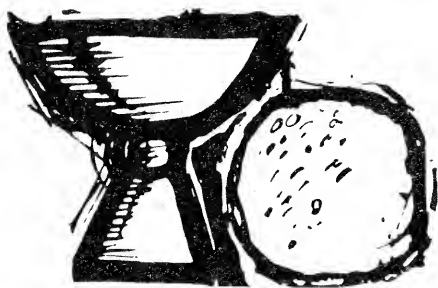


Leonor de Mendez, Guatemala

Leonor feels she is doing what God is asking of her and what God allowed her to train to do. She continues to accept challenges the Lord sends her way. At this writing, she is working on presentations to give at the Hispanic Mennonite Women's Conference in the United States.

One of the needs that Leonor sees for the Guatemalan church is in-depth study of Anabaptism. She sees a lack of unity in the theology among the churches. Even the Casa Horeb congregation has not yet reached the stage of having common objectives and is still lacking in organization.

Mildred Yoder and her husband, Henry, of Souderton, Pa. have served as MCC country representatives in Guatemala since 1984. They are members of Plains Mennonite Church in Lansdale, Pa. Mildred is a retired schoolteacher.



Alba says, as Isaiah said, "Here am I, Lord, send me."

by Mildred L. Yoder

Alba de Escobar

Sunday morning services here at Casa Horeb in Guatemala City are interesting and innovative. Our pastoral couple, Alba de Escobar and her husband, Rafael, work at making church meaningful. Whether they are leading a wedding or sharing a Bible input, sometimes even with their two children, one never senses competition but rather true teamwork with each partner using the gifts God gave them.

Alba had a happy childhood in a Christian home, with much love from parents and extended family. From early on her parents encouraged her to develop her talents. Although they did not anticipate her becoming a pastor, they supported her in this calling. God especially touched Alba through her mother, who was a living example of what Christianity is all about—by example, attitudes and actions, as well as by her teaching.

Alba has training as an elementary teacher as well as a social worker. She is presently finishing her thesis to complete a masters program in social work. By extension she has completed 16 courses in religious studies through Campus Crusade. She is also actively involved in SEMILLA courses, seminary-level classes in Central America, sponsored by Eastern Board.

In the early years of their marriage the Escobars worked with Campus Crusade, and attended Casa Horeb, a Mennonite church. Casa Horeb eventually asked them to become its pastors, and they jointly decided that the Lord was leading them in this direction. When they were ordained as a pastor couple, Alba became the first Mennonite woman pastor to be ordained in Guatemala.

Among her responsibilities Alba is involved in the Ministry of the Woman, helping to develop women's gifts and abilities within the congregation. She supports the small groups of women who meet for Bible study and mutual encouragement by providing courses and leadership training for them.

A gifted administrator, Alba is also involved in overall planning. She feels less comfortable with preaching, not because she is a woman but rather because it is not a gift God has given her.

Casa Horeb is composed of approximately 250 persons—about 70 men, 130 women and 50 children. Alba feels that in general the members encourage her work as a pastor. Casa Horeb is more open to women in leadership than are other Mennonite churches in Guatemala City or other evangelical churches in Guatemala. Alba attributes women's low level of participation in church leadership to several factors. Women themselves are not yet able to accept the idea that they are capable of leadership. Also, a general attitude of male dominance has kept women back throughout Latin American history.

Alba works at balancing her multiple roles as mother, wife, pastor and daughter. Her two children, ages 11 and 12, are cooperative and often accompany their parents to their various activities. For a 33-year-old woman, Alba has led a busy life.



Alba de Escobar, Guatemala

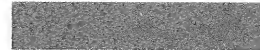
Alba prefers to set year-by-year, rather than long-term goals. She is eager to help women become more of an obvious presence in society, where they can help present an alternative to a broken people. She wants to work at

"My parents encouraged my spiritual development. But I remember especially one of my grade school teachers. She was such a good example that I wanted to be a Christian like her. She is very old now and I visit her when I go back to the colony."

developing a church identity that is Christ-centered and Anabaptist. She hopes to help break the traditional structures that have marginalized and oppressed women, so that they can enter their proper and valued positions in the church. She nurtures a vision in which the encouragement of congregational leadership gifts leads to spiritual growth followed by numerical growth.

Alba and Rafael continue to want to follow as God leads. Alba says, as Isaiah said, "Here am I, Lord, send me."

Mildred Yoder and her husband, Henry, of Souderton, Pa., have served as MCC country representatives in Guatemala since 1984. They are members of Plains Mennonite Church in Lansdale, Pa. Mildred is a retired schoolteacher.



by Betty Hochstetter

Suse Janzen de Penner

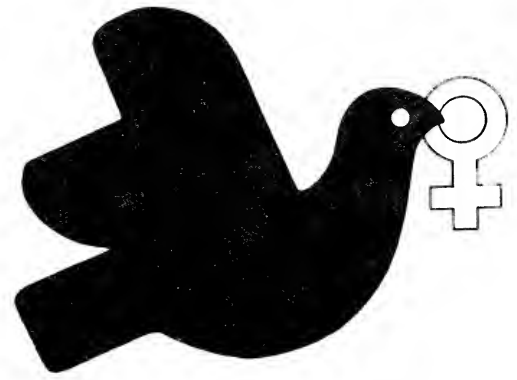
Suse Penner is known as a hard worker—someone who finds out what needs to be done and digs in. She learned this early in life. She was born in 1940 in the Friesland Colony in Paraguay. Her parents had fled Russia, coming through Germany with large groups of Mennonites between the two wars.

Life was hard those years and as the oldest of six brothers and one sister, she worked long hours on the farm. She never ate supper but quickly bathed every evening to go to church—choir practice twice a week, Bible study, prayer services and youth meetings filled her teen years. The colony had no electricity and her family could not afford a flashlight, and Suse often bumped into cows laying on the dusty road. When it rained she carried her shoes in one hand and her umbrella in the other and washed her feet at the church door.

"I raised my younger brothers," Suse says, "because my mother sewed for others, everything from men's suits and women's dresses to underclothes. She often sewed by lantern light. My parents encouraged my spiritual development. But I remember especially one of my grade school teachers. She was such a good example that I wanted to be a Christian like her. She is very old now and I visit her when I go back to the colony."

Suse began to dream of being a missionary after seeing some Canadian missionaries give a slide presentation of their work at a leprosarium and a Spanish-speaking church. But she felt an enormous barrier—colony life was very closed and her German Mennonite culture felt confining. She spoke only German and low German. How could she serve her Paraguayan neighbors with the cultural/language framework she possessed!





She decided to go to the Mennonite seminary in Montevideo, a big decision since she knew that after her plane crossed the 1,000 miles of pampa, there would be no money for a return passage until graduation three or four years later. She was 20, tall, blond and eager to prepare for God's service when she said goodbye to the colony.



Suse Janzen de Penner, Brazil

Suse enrolled in Christian education, but also signed up for piano and music lessons. The first months were extremely difficult with a new language and culture to learn. By the end of the first month, she was discouraged. "I decided I'd stay until the end of the year, but that would be enough. I had never formed new friendships. The students from Argentina seemed very strange. They acted as if the seminary rules didn't exist. I had been taught a high regard for rules and authority. How could Christian girls keep talking till 1 a.m. when they knew that lights out and silence were to be observed at 10 p.m.?"

She adjusted to seminary and learned to love not only the studies but also Teodoro Penner, a German Mennonite student from Brazil. They were married in 1967.

Their first major assignment was in the isolated community of Araguacema. Suse soon learned Portuguese—and motherhood. She went to the hospital 600 miles away for their daughter's Amalia's birth in 1968. She related to the struggles of the women of the interior town who were far from city amenities and supplies. Suse hosted visitors, worked with the church women and helped her pastor-husband. Another daughter, Silvia, was born in 1972. Suse suffered painful complications. Living in the tropics of northern Brazil became more difficult.

Now fluent in Portuguese and Brazilian ways, the family moved 1,800 miles south to Palmeira. Teo became the director of a large Mennonite day care center with more than 200 children. Suse threw herself into the work, soon finding her niche managing the kitchen and cleaning areas.

Her girls grew up with the day care center children. Suse grew to fill an important place in the lives of the children and the program of the center. She rarely took time for herself. It was a shock to everyone when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She had a radical mastectomy. She continued her care for the children.

Moved by the enormous needs of many families, she and Teo organized classes to help educate children and parents. They distributed used clothing and visited families. Teo pastored the Palmeira church and Suse found time to build relationships among the women.

In 1980-81, the family spent a year studying at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Ind. Again, Suse learned a new language and American ways. Housekeeping, shopping, raising children and friendships had to be relearned.

By the end of 1983, after a number of administrative difficulties, Suse and Teo left the day care center to devote themselves full time to the work of the Palmeira church. Suse planted a yard full of flowers, put out her needlework crafts, settled their teen-age daughters, put on classical music and opened the doors of their new home to neighbors, visitors and friends. Her cooking combines the best of German, American and Brazilian cuisine. Her *More with Less Cookbook* looks well used.

Suse visits a number of families who struggle with problems. She leads an afternoon women's meeting. She serves as Sunday school superintendent at the 75-member church. Since Teo, now executive secretary of the Brazilian Mennonite Church, travels nearly half the time for the national church, Suse takes responsibility for keeping things going at home.

On several occasions, she has helped unwed mothers place their babies in Christian homes. Suse cares for the babies while the paperwork is completed.

Recently when the house rent went up, Suse was ready to move into the church basement. She is willing to live simply. She wonders about the motivation of church members—are they participants in Christ's body for the "multiplication

of the loaves and fishes?" How stable and deep is their relationship with the Lord?

When I interviewed Suse for this article, she was at the apartment of their two daughters who live in Curitiba because of their schooling. Curitiba is a 1½ hour drive from Palmeira. Teo had gone to a literature commission meeting in Campinas. In her characteristic serenity, Suse told me that their future is uncertain. In 1989 they will move 400 miles north to Campinas, Sao Paulo. Teo will become the director of the leadership training course of the Mennonite Church, along with his executive secretary job. Suse's role is undefined. But she says, "I think I might enjoy a job taking care of small babies. I enjoyed that a lot."

Of one thing I am sure, however—Suse will not take long to find how she can help heal hurts. She is not flashy but has a flair for work, for service to build God's kingdom on earth, both within the program of the local church and in the larger world program.

Betty Hochstetter and her husband, Otis, have worked with Mennonite Board of Missions in Brazil since 1966. They have two children, Dick, 20, and Deb, 16. From Orrville, Ohio, Betty enjoys music and people. She has a degree in home economics education from Goshen College and taught three years in Goshen.

by Milka Rindzinski
(translated from Spanish by Emily Will)

From Montevideo, Uruguay

I was born in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, a small South American country of 3 million inhabitants. The population is almost entirely of European origin, mostly from Spain and Italy. The dominant religion is Roman Catholicism.

My father was born in the city of Memmel, next to the Baltic Sea, of a Jewish family. He emigrated to Uruguay alone and at a very young age, before World War II, when



things were becoming very difficult in Europe. My mother was born in Uruguay, of Italian parents.

I am the oldest of four children—three girls and a boy. As children we received Catholic instruction, although tainted with my father's skepticism. Although my father claimed not to be religious, he was "uprightness" personified. There were priests among my mother's ancestors and rabbis among my father's.

If I had been told as a child that I would not marry and mother a large family, I don't know if I would have been able to tolerate it. I thought this to be not only my calling but also a woman's most natural task.

Well, I didn't marry. I didn't have children. I've had to use my endowment of mother-love and wisdom on my nieces and nephews and other young relatives. The companionship that might have been enjoyed in a marriage I have given and received in relationships with friends and family.

It's possible, as some maintain, that Uruguayan society is eminently matriarchal, but this would be true only within the confines of the family. In many homes the mother is the true head, the one who makes the decisions and raises the children. But the Uruguayan man reserves for himself the right to dominate outside the home.

I live with my mother, who at 82 years continues giving music lessons, and with an adolescent niece whom I have been caring for the last seven years. Our home, then, is a home of women. I have had to try to assume the roles of father and mother for niece and in some way provide for my mother the companionship she has needed since my father's death in 1973. I cannot deny that my family

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responsibilities worry me a great deal and take up much of my time, but they also enrich my life.

When I was 23 and working as a commercial secretary, I came into contact with a Mennonite missionary family. From that point on, my plans began to be upset, my uncertainties began to be clarified and my true vocation began to reveal itself. I had a face-to-face encounter with the God of the universe and with Jesus Christ, his son and my savior, who little by little and more and more was becoming the Lord of my life.



Milka Rindzinski, Uruguay

I was the first Uruguayan to be baptized in the Mennonite Church. That was in 1956. From the beginning I worked side by side with the missionaries to found congregations. For 12 years I continued working as a commercial secretary during the day and dedicated practically all the rest of my time to serving the church. I did some of everything: distributed flyers, played music in evangelistic crusades, lead Bible study for adults and children, preached, visited, polished church benches. I hope every new member today finds as much to do as I did then!

In addition, I studied at the Mennonite seminary in Montevideo by night and did secretarial work for the director. My days seemed to have more than 24 hours in them and my home life took second place, not without objections from my father, who was a family man.

My younger sister was the first to marry. Her first daughter became my spiritual daughter. Her parents permitted me

to guide her, and today she and her husband pastor one of our Mennonite congregations.

The idea of working full time for the church was never agreeable to me. I thought it preferable to give of my time and gifts on a volunteer basis. But the day came when my work as a commercial secretary began to lose its meaning. I also began to feel a growing desire to be part of the seminary community, which seemed to me to be the place where things were happening.

Thus when in 1968 I was invited to work part time at the seminary and to study library science there, I forsook my determination to not depend economically on the church, and I accepted.

A few years later, in 1974, the Mennonite Seminary of Montevideo closed its doors. Here I was prepared to be a librarian and I had no library. That wasn't all. The seminary community, my faith community, also disintegrated.

It was a shock at the time. But I've never regretted having studied library science. I've had opportunities to help organize book collections in various countries. I've even received job offers from institutions in other countries but I've never wanted to leave Uruguay. I've always felt that my place is in the Uruguayan church.

Since 1963 I've served as secretary and treasurer of the Mission Board of the Mennonite Churches of Uruguay, made up of representatives of both German- and Spanish-speaking congregations. Twenty five years and 94 meetings later, I'm convinced that it's time to turn over these responsibilities to someone else. I'm thankful for the extraordinary avenues of service and of learning they've provided me.

At the congregational level, I've almost constantly served on the church council and/or the pastoral team, sometimes carrying nearly all the leadership responsibility. Although I've preached innumerable times, I feel more called to lead Bible studies than to preach.

The missionaries as well as the church members have always encouraged me to assume leadership functions, taking more into account my gifts than my gender. Only once several years ago did I encounter open opposition from a pastor to my assuming pastoral duties. Up until then I never imagined that the fact of my being a woman could limit what I could do in the church—not in Uruguay. I had heard much about women's struggles for equality in other places, but I had always felt that we were above that

"When it's necessary, may we be emboldened to intercede on behalf of the powerless. May we live and act in the hope and happiness that comes from knowing that nothing we do is in vain, because God's reign has already begun and is among us."


problem in the Uruguayan church. But it wasn't so.

Not a single woman in the Uruguayan Mennonite churches is ordained. They are not invited to be ordained, and neither do they request it. I haven't heard any talk about women's ordination and am beginning to wonder whether the time hasn't come to raise the issue.

I personally don't feel particularly discriminated against at this time. If I haven't been offered certain positions, I prefer to think it's due to my limitations, my personality, my preferences and especially to my gifts. I've always found ways of serving that have permitted me to share the vision granted my by God. Lately, as coordinator of the Center for Studies of the Mennonite Churches of Uruguay, I have opportunity to plan the program, and select the courses and professors that create the Biblical theological base for the young men and women who will be our future church leaders.

Last year we included in the program a Biblical anthropology course in which current interpretations of Biblical teachings about women were reviewed and discussed. A man taught the course, which was taken by both male and female students - something I believe to be important. Although I've attended women's conferences and believe they're useful, to speak among women is only part of the task. Males, young men and boys, need also to discuss women's issues.

Of course, I hope and long for a Uruguayan Mennonite church that treats men and women as equals. May we become a people that is increasingly compassionate towards those who suffer injustice, towards those who are discriminated against, towards the poor—and may we not countenance such aberrations to occur among us in the church. When it's necessary, may we be emboldened to intercede on behalf of the powerless. May we live and act in the hope and happiness that comes from knowing that nothing we do is in vain, because God's reign has already begun and is among us.



by Virginia Claassen

Mayumi Miki

What good would it be to know the language if her words had no content? Mayumi Miki spoke of her spiritual pilgrimage which has brought her to the leadership position of the Fukuoka Mennonite Church—and hopefully a step closer to her goal of sharing her faith in China. Realizing that a thorough knowledge of the Bible would be necessary for such a ministry, she entered Japan Bible Seminary in 1983.

Mayumi became a Christian at age 16 and soon afterwards decided to devote her life to Christian service. At Kumamoto University she joined a group of students for Bible study. She also met David Kruse, an independent missionary, who became one of her mentors.

As a sophomore she attended a KGK (Japan's Intersarsity) conference. An assignment for one of the sectional meetings was to read a biography of Hudson Taylor. Through this book, God encouraged her to be a more active Christian. It also sparked in her an interest in and a desire to pray for China, a country whose influence has reached into many areas of Japanese life and culture.

Mayumi often spent her vacations with her parents at Beppu. On these visits she began attending a church newly established by General Conference Mennonite missionaries Peter and Mary Derksen. After graduating in chemistry, Mayumi found a job as a lab assistant in the biochemistry department of Oita Medical College. Because the college was near her parent's home, she began to attend Beppu Mennonite Church regularly.

"I would like for them (Japanese church women) to be more positive, more active, to be vivid Christians in their congregations and in their society."



Mayumi's parents were not Christians, but did not oppose her becoming one. Quitting a good job and going off to seminary, however, was another matter. Although Mayumi's parents are still not reconciled to her decision, Mayumi receives support from one of her sisters, also a Christian, with whom she lives.

As Mayumi sought a place to serve after her seminary graduation in 1986, the Fukuoka Church was in need of leadership. A small congregation, they could not support a pastor with a family. A single worker seemed just right. For Mayumi, the decision to go to Fukuoka was not an easy one. She was a woman and she was single. Could she handle such an assignment? As she debated, the truth of Paul's words to the Corinthians, "My grace is sufficient for you..." became very meaningful. Peter Derksen became the bridge between Mayumi and the church, and helped her work out the arrangements for becoming their leader.

Mayumi has a varied schedule. On Sunday mornings she oversees Sunday school, a group of about 10 children. She usually brings the worship service message, and conducts monthly communion services. After service, she fellowships with those who have time to stay, and they usually enjoy a meal prepared by some of the young people.

Monday is her day off. One Tuesday afternoon per month she meets with an interdenominational group. Tuesday evenings she attends a university students' Bible study, of which she is the advisor. Wednesday is her day for personal Bible study. Thursday evenings she leads the Bible study and prayer meeting at her church. Two Friday mornings a month she leads a women's meeting at the church.

Saturdays she prepares for Sunday. She also distributes tracts and does visitation. Mayumi says she most enjoys Bible exegesis.

Her congregation is small—usually seven women and one man at the worship service. Three deacons assist with leadership. Not all who attend are church members and Mayumi realizes how important her seminary training has been in answering seekers' questions. Her vision is not primarily numerical growth—although she would like to see this happen — but rather growth in faith.

Mayumi struggles with the fact that some pastors, as well as some members of her own congregation, do not accept her as a pastor, but only as a woman evangelist. She also has to deal with her own feelings of not being suited for the position of pastor, as well as with her singleness. She feels it is better for a Christian worker to be married.

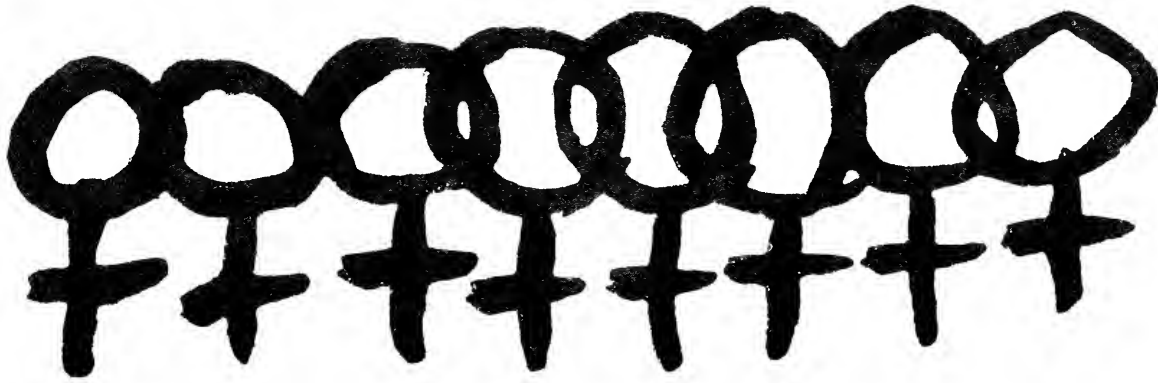
But Mayumi doesn't let these problems get her down. Emotionally strong, she takes things in stride. She is tough without being pushy. She also has a deep conviction about following God's call, and says that every Christian is sometimes called upon to serve in a pastoral role. She believes the problems faced by a woman pastor become insignificant if one follows Biblical teachings, rather than others' opinions.

Mayumi finds rewards in the fellowship and support of Christian sisters and brothers. She especially appreciates that her travel expenses were paid to one of the Japan Mennonite Christian Church Conference's annual women's meetings.

She has found, though, that support structures for women leaders are not adequate. Mayumi feels that the barriers to women's leadership are greater in Japan than in North America. She says that Japanese people prefer strong male leadership, and find it difficult to rely on someone who is young (she is 32) and a woman. But she feels that as a woman she can work better with women than men can, that women are better caregivers and counselors, that they are better at noting details. She is quick to add, however, that this all depends on the individual. She also feels that in times of crisis, such as a funeral, a man is needed. And while most Japanese men drive cars, Mayumi cannot.

Women church workers in Japan will increase, says Mayumi. With changing attitudes and more women going to college, doors to opportunity and acceptance will open.

Mayumi believes Japanese church women are "rather conservative, moderate." "I would like for them to be more



positive, more active, to be vivid Christians in their congregations and in their society,” she adds. She finds it important to remember that the work of the church is done not by men or women, but by God, by the Holy Spirit.

Although Mayumi feels that Fukuoka is where God has placed her for the present, she has not lost her vision for China. She is waiting for further guidance and is sure that the grace that has been sufficient for her work in Fukuoka will also be sufficient for a ministry in China or wherever God leads her.

Virginia Claassen has been serving with the General Conference Commission on Overseas Missions since 1959. She teaches Bible classes and conversational English. Claassen is a member of Emmaus Mennonite Church in Whitewater, Kan.

by Alice W. Lapp

Esther Harso

In 1940, a daughter Esther was born into a well-to-do family in Sulewesi, an island of Indonesia. The child's mother had been a strong Muslim but married a Christian man. As she matured, Esther decided to become a physician because she observed many sick people, not the least of whom was her own mother.

After she had studied for a time in medical school, her father approached her with his own burden. “When your mother began attending the Christian church, I promised God that one of my children would be a servant to the church. You are my youngest child. Your sisters and brother do not want to work for the church. If you do not work in the church, I lied to God. I can’t stand that and had better die. Therefore you must withdraw from medical school and go to the Christian seminary.”

Reluctantly, Esther did as her father wished because she loved him and wanted his happiness. After a year of theological studies, she wished to leave the school—but her father became ill. Afraid for his health should she quit, she persevered in her studies and was ordained in 1962 to a small congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in Kendari, a small town in northern Sulawesi.

She was not happy in her work. On his deathbed, however, Esther's father made her promise to always work in church service and to love Jesus above all. With this promise, Esther finally accepted that God's will for her life was pastoring and spiritual healing, rather than medicine.

Esther married Soesanto Harso of Central Java, a young man she had met at seminary, and in 1965 the couple was called to the town of Pati in Central Java to serve as pastors in the Mennonite Church there. She also taught Christian education in both elementary and high schools, but more recently has taught teachers of Christian education.

From 1975 to 1978 Esther and Soesanto attended the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Ind. Since their return to Indonesia she has found herself fully immersed in the work of the church. Esther has traveled extensively, sometimes representing the Mennonite Church of Java. She has attended Mennonite World Conference and other conferences from Paraguay, Brazil, India, Europe and the United States to Thailand.

Esther preaches at least one sermon each Sunday that she is present at the Central Christian Church in Pati. Sometimes she preaches at each of the three regular Sunday services. When she and Soesanto first came to Pati in 1965, some 70 families attended the church. Now more than 250 attend, and the young people's group numbers over 400. She frequently leads her church's 5:15 a.m. daily prayer service, with up to three dozen people regularly in attendance. She also directs four different Bible study groups at the four compass points of the city. The Harsos' comfortable home seems like Grand Central Station as people drop in from morning into the night for counselling on economic, spiritual, political or physical problems.



Esther Harso, Indonesia

Although her first several years of pastoring were very difficult, partly because of her disappointment at leaving her medical studies, the assertive, energetic woman is now reconciled to her work and happy to be serving the Lord as a pastor.

Esther continues to further her studies, now working on a doctorate in theology from a seminary in Plymouth, Fla. She attends conferences on peace and social concerns at every opportunity.

Her husband, Soesanto, is currently the executive secretary of the Mennonite Evangelical Church of Java. The conference numbers over 48,000 members and worships in two languages—Javanese and Indonesian. Esther is fluent in both of these languages and also speaks and reads English.

Esther feels that God has been guiding her and is happy in the vocation she did not choose but in which she now finds satisfaction as she guides other people in finding the Christian way of life.

Alice and her husband John are the parents of three children. They reside in Akron, Pa., and attend Lititz Mennonite Church. Alice is a teacher by training and serves on various boards and committees.

Letters

- I am presently a senior at Freeman Academy in Freeman, South Dakota. I am in the process of writing a research paper for Mennonite History on the subject of women's role in the church and how it has changed over the years. I would appreciate any issues from *Report* that would apply to my paper.

Thank you for your help and cooperation as I complete this semester project.

—Allison Kaufman, Marion S.D.

- I want to convey my compliments and thanks for a worthwhile and appreciated periodical. The issues are thoughtfully prepared and have become an invaluable resource for me, both for personal development and public presentations. I enjoy the sense of 'connectedness' when I recognize the name of an author or a person in your "News and Verbs" — female networking!

I am in the process of establishing private, nonprofit Christian daycare centres to be funded by a private foundation. Are you aware of any other daycare centres which are operated on Christian values? How can we connect? It would be good to share ideas for this unique ministry. Have you published any *Report* issues in the past on the daycare issue? If so, would you please send me a copy. Thank you.

—Ruth Braun, KinderWorld Daycare, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Ed. Note: Readers who have information and resources to share with Ruth, please send them to her at KinderWorld Daycare, 403-326 Broadway, Winnipeg, Manitoba. R3C 0S5.

- This is just a short note to tell you that I appreciate your bimonthly *Women's Concerns Report*.

I'm on a circulation list and I receive *Report* sometimes months "after the fact." But I regularly find they challenge my thinking. In fact, I think it's one of the finest publications distributed within the Anabaptist family of churches.

One of my tasks for Mennonite Board of Missions is to produce a semi-regular video program called "All God's People." Simply put, it's a collection of stories about persons following God's call for their lives. The *Report* is a primary source for me as I look for story ideas about women. These stories don't seem to make it into our regular stream of Mennonite periodicals.

Thanks for a job well done. I expect to continue to be able to use my copies of *Report* in practical ways!

—J. Ron Byler, Executive Producer, Media Ministries, Elkhart Ind.

- Thank you for *Report* sent to me regularly. It has provided me with many a helpful moment. The issue I received today (*Report* No. 80, Women with Disabilities) was most inspiring and it was read from cover to cover. Thanks!

I am sending you my change of address as well as a slight change in name.

—Elsie Wiens-Vernon, Beamsville, Ontario

- I read *Report* as regularly as possible, and appreciate your sensitive and timely discussions of the various issues confronting women.

As a male reader, however, I am concerned about the images created by an illustration in the article, "Shaking off Stereotypes," in the Sept.-Oct. issue (No. 80, Women with Disabilities). The illustration reflects a male stereotype that is, in its own way, as debilitating and dehumanizing to men as the female stereotypes that women frequently face.

I believe that male and female stereotypes are intimately interrelated, and that the struggle against the one set of stereotypes cannot be successful without a concomitant commitment to struggle against the other.

—Doug Wiebe, Toronto, Ontario

Illustrator's Reply: It's gratifying to read that someone is disturbed by what he perceives to be a stereotype.

I tried to portray Irene Ewert Wiebe's childhood/youth experiences with both men and women. I could have drawn only women, but surrounded as Irene was by a family which included older brothers and a father, it would not have been realistic.

The illustrations are intended to do just that—illustrate! Taken in context with Irene's story, the cartoons tried to portray what life was like for her.

Hopefully, someday we'll all "shake off our stereotypes."

—Dena R. Epp

- I just finished reading the Sept.-Oct. *Report* (No. 80, Women with Disabilities). This is my first exposure to this pertinent newsletter. I'm impressed by the quality and the power that characterize it. It's because I am presently serving as the interim pastor here that I stumbled onto it. I'm thankful for that good fortune.

The main reason I am writing is to subscribe to *Report* for my daughter who is interested and active in women's concerns. Please send the Sept.-Oct. issue, if possible. I know she will appreciate it. Thank you.

—Vernon Lohrentz, Arvada Mennonite Church, Arvada, Colo.

- I received with pleasure the copy of *Report* which featured women and disabilities as its concern. We have been interested in this issue for some time and have had the

• **Ann Stuckey** was ordained as associate pastor of First Mennonite Church of Iowa City, Iowa, in November. She was licensed in 1987. Her duties include campus ministry and Christian education.

• **Mary Jane Fox** recently joined the pastoral team of Community Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va. She is small group coordinator.

• **Florence Schloneger** was ordained as copastor of Bethel Mennonite Church, West

Liberty, Ohio in September. She has served as copastor, along with her husband, Weldun, since 1984.

• **Janice Yordy Sutter** and **Dave Sutter** were installed as pastors of Kern Road Mennonite Church, South Bend, Ind. in the fall. They served previously in Colorado where Janice was associate pastor at First Mennonite Church of Denver and Dave was a ministerial intern at Glennon Heights Mennonite Church.

privilege of presenting a workshop on the subject for the women of the Episcopal Church gathered in convention in Detroit last July. I am sending you a copy of the materials which we distributed to them at this time.

I hope you will continue to raise the issues of women with disabilities and to work toward bettering their position in our society and in our churches. Thank you.

—*Barbara Ramnaraine, Coordinator, the Diocesan Office on Ministry with the Handicapped, Minneapolis, Minn.*

We encourage and invite letters from readers that speak to the issues raised and the perspectives presented in Report. Although we try to print all letters, some may be shortened or edited to fit available space. All letters must be signed, although writers may request to have their names withheld.

News

and

Verbs

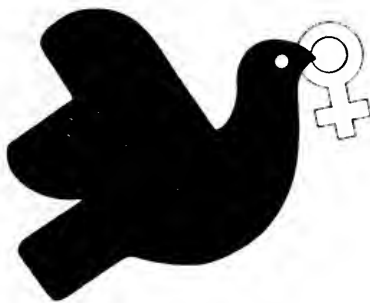
- The *Church of Sweden's* November report states the General Assembly of the Church of Sweden **approved measures to assure equality of men and women in the church**. The Swedish Church Assembly decided to appoint a working group to ensure that male and female priests enjoy equal rights, status and respect. It also voted that women may be ordained as priests even in a diocese where the bishop opposes the ordination of women.
- Two bodies of the United Church of Christ have become the first national religious agencies to join a new **boycott against Nestle and the American Home Products Corporation** to protest aggressive marketing of breast milk

substitutes, especially to hospitals in third world nations. A Minneapolis based consumer group alleges that Nestle has broken a 1984 promise to restrict marketing of breast milk substitutes. Nestle is reported to have given large amounts of free infant formula to hospitals in poor nations. Boycott advocates say that formula can be dangerous or cause malnutrition when mixed with impure water, is over-diluted or prepared in unsanitary bottles.

- The *New York Times* reported that a woman Episcopal priest met opposition from the Church of England after celebrating communion in an Anglican chapel in the London diocese. The Reverend Suzanne Fageol has been regularly celebrating the Eucharist at services sponsored by a British ecumenical group. The Anglican bishop of London, the Reverend Graham Leonard, said that no church leader has "any authority to allow a woman ordained priest overseas to function as such here."
- Pope John Paul the second said the **growing need for more priests in the Roman Catholic church will not lead to ordaining women** or opening the door to married priests. The pontiff said that though the church may look foolish for not adjusting its rules to meet the needs of the institution the church will maintain its rules on the priesthood because it "bears witness to a divine wisdom not of this world."
- The Franconia Foundation is interested in giving **help to Mennonite women who wish to explore new ways to develop and use their gifts** through the implementation of a project which has personal significance and the potential to contribute to other persons, the church, society and humankind. Grants are available for Mennonite women from the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Eastern District, the Franconia Conference and Lancaster Conference, but women who are forty-five or older will be given first consideration. Academic education and academic degrees are not qualifying considerations. Submit applications by September 1 to: Franconia Foundation, 1191 Sumneytown Pike, Harleysville, PA 19438.
- Spanish Education for Women announces its fourth **intensive Spanish language program** to be held in Guadalajara, Mexico. Designed for women of faith committed to social justice, the program offers: individual tutoring by neighborhood women; women-focused text; experience of Latin-American culture; and lodging in modest homes in active faith community. The 1989 session begins June 26 and runs through August 11. For more information, please contact: Spanish Education for Women, P. O. Box 29338, Washington, D.C. 20017.

Upcoming Events:

Conciliation Training Institute, June 26-30, 1989, at MCC, Akron will focus on interpersonal mediation skills and group conflict intervention. It is sponsored by Mennonite Conciliation Service, a program of MCC U.S. Peace Section. The trainers are MCS staffpersons John Paul Lederach and Alice Price. More information is available from MCS at Box M, Akron, PA 17501.



Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

Some graphics used from rural women in action and feminist logo's published by Int'l Women's Tribune Centre, New York, N.Y. 110017.

Photo of Suse Penner taken by Betty Hochstetler

- Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are giving their support to women of the Lutheran churches in Namibia through fund raising, letter writing and education. The **Campaign in Support of Women in Namibia** is meant to get women of the Lutheran Church involved in providing services and learning more about the women of Namibia. The Lutheran women will be addressing a recent report indicating that the government of South Africa is injecting a contraceptive into Namibian women that was banned from distribution in the United States. The drug was reported to have ties to liver damage, birth defects, and cancer.
- Ten Latin American and Caribbean women recently toured the United States as part of an exchange designed to build understanding among women. The National Council of Churches sponsored the sharing experience that took place in churches, unions and community organizations. The objective of the exchange was to enable North American, Latin American, and Caribbean women to destroy the walls and myths that surround them and to discover each other.
- This year's winner of the Henry Smith Peace Oratorical Contest is **Katrina Hunsberger** of Ulster, Pa. She is a student at the Philadelphia campus of Messiah College. Hunsberger said in her speech—"A Christian Response to Racism"—that racism in America is a form of warfare and challenged Christians to confront the evils of racism.
- The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns is looking for a replacement for Wanda Bryant of Philadelphia who has served on the committee since 1986. The three-year position is open to a Mennonite Church woman from the United States. We are particularly interested in a woman who currently lives in the east or who has ties to that area. For more information or to express interest, contact Christine W. Nofsinger, MCC, Box M, Akron, PA 17501 by April 15, 1989.
- **Where Two Are Gathered: Readings for Shared Devotions** (Brethren Press, 1988), a new book by April Yamasaki, is for two people to use together— husband and wife, two prayer partners, or two friends. Through responsive readings and suggestions for prayer, meditation, and discussion, this collection seeks to deepen both partners' commitment to God and to each other. Yamasaki, of Vancouver, British Columbia, is currently a visiting scholar at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.

REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

REPORT edited by Christine Wenger Nofsinger. Layout by Shirley Stauffer Redekop. Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Christine Nofsinger, Editor, MCC, Box M, Akron, PA 17501.

U.S. residents may send subscriptions to the above address. Canadian residents may send subscriptions to MCC Canada, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9. A donation of \$10.00 per year per subscription is suggested.



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